



Domestic Violence Program

SCHWANN HOPKINS
FEBRUARY 1, 2019

South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services

Domestic Violence Supervision

South Carolina is currently ranked among the top six states in the country in domestic violence. South Carolina has held the position as the deadliest state in the country four times for the past decade¹. In 2015, Governor Haley signed bill 16-25-10 into law to toughen the restrictions for domestic violence offenders (See Appendix A). As part of bill 16-25-10, a task force was developed which included representatives from various state agencies and Probation, Parole and Pardon Services Director, Jerry B. Adger. Under the directions of Director Adger, November 2017, South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services established a special unit to supervise domestic violent offenders. Fifteen (15) counties were tasked with supervising this offender population under different guidelines from the regular population of offenders.

South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services mission is **to prepare** offenders under supervision to become productive members of the community: **to provide** assistance to victims of crimes, the courts and the Parole Board; and **to protect** the public trust and safety². The establishment of the domestic violence program is designed to reduce the recidivism of the offender by providing a partnership supervision approach that includes the probation agent, local law enforcement, solicitors, judges, treatment providers and the

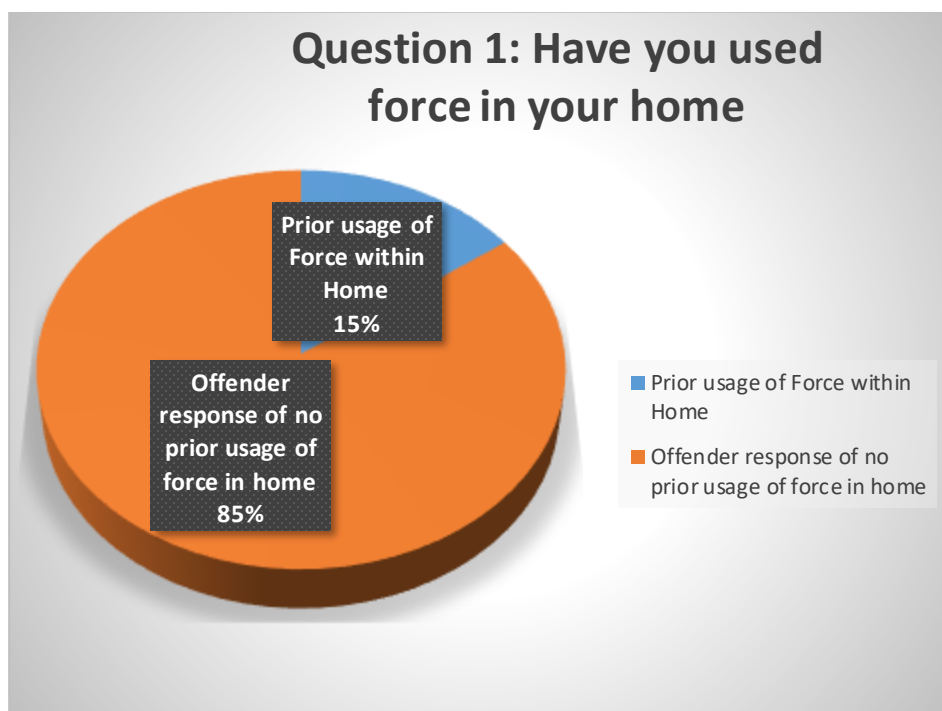
¹ Violence Policy Center <http://vpc.org/>

² South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services

community. The goal of this partnership methodology is to hold the offender accountable, to protect the victim and community, and to provide a holistic approach that will reduce the cycle of domestic violence in South Carolina.

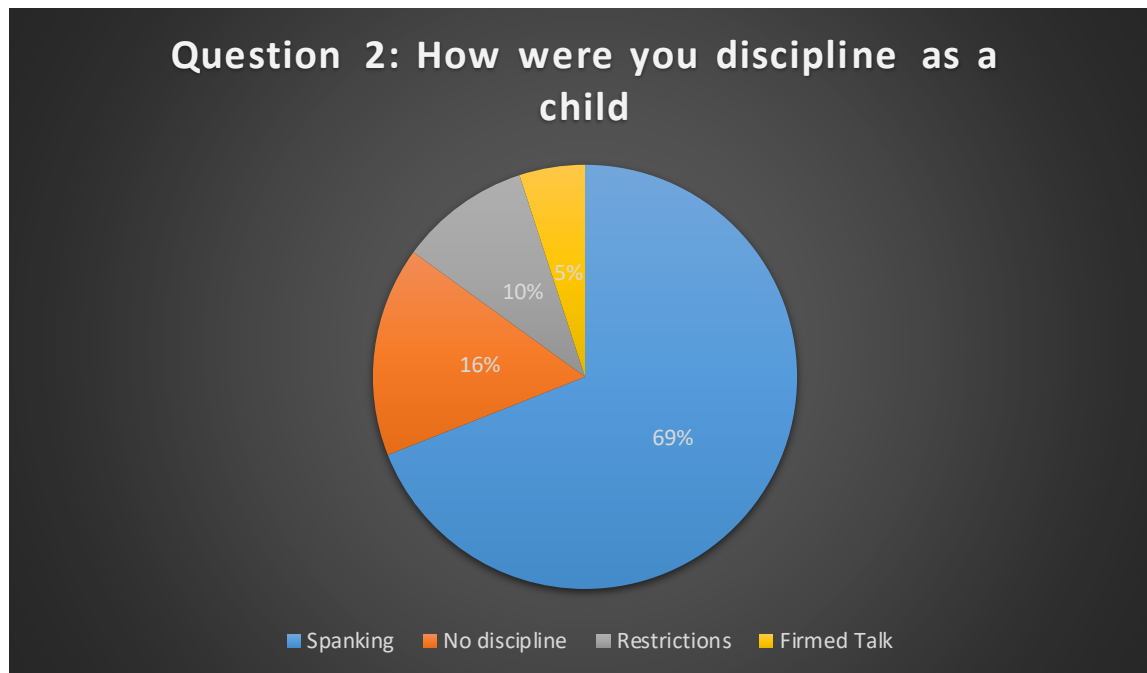
The purpose of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of the domestic violence supervision program. I want to determine if the new supervision guidelines for the domestic violence offenders will stop the cycle of abuse. To determine the success of the domestic violence supervision, I collected data that provide direct contributing factors to the causes of the offender's violent behavior and the guidelines that are imposed during supervision. There are 1,174 domestic violent offenders in the program. I collected a random sample of 150 social histories for any information on the offender's family environment and any abuse the offender may have experienced. Also, from the social histories, I collected data of prior substance abuse. This information was obtained from the agency's Offender Management System (OMS). Social histories are used to collect data that will assist in developing an individual case plan for the offender. An offender's case plan outlines the services that the offender may need to reduce recidivism, such as, mental health treatment, GED, job readiness program and battery treatment. In reviewing the social histories of the domestic violent offenders, I discovered the exact social history template is being used as for the general population of offenders. Only two questions on the social history relate to violence that the offender may experience, and which may therefore contribute to the offender's behavior as it relates to domestic violence. Those questions are: (1) Have you ever used force in your home and (2) How were you disciplined as a child. From a sample of 100 social histories, the following data was collected based on the two questions within the social history. Eighty-five (85) percent of the domestic violent offenders

answered that they never used any force in their home while only fifteen percent stated that they have. According to Psychology Today article written by Sherry Hamby, only 1 out of 4 cases of domestic violence is reported to law enforcement³. This is a clear example on the data that is represented in the charts. I did a random review of forty criminal history (rap sheets) of the offender who stated that they have never used any force within their homes. Thirty (30) out of the forty (40) offenders had criminal records indicting arrests for several violent charges, such as, simple assault, assault and battery of a high aggravated nature, domestic violence and pointing a firearm.



³ Psychology Today Website article <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-web-violence/201410/guess-how-many-domestic-violence-offenders-go-jail>

The second question asked: How were you discipline as a child, out of the 100 social histories, 69% answered that they were spanked, 16% answered no form of discipline and 10% answered restrictions and 5% answered a firmed talk. The chart below reflects the data outcome of the second question.



There are studies that correlate a child's discipline with the propensity of the child becoming violent. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of Women Health, states that children who witness domestic violence or are victims of physical abuse are at a greater risk of being violent in their future relationships.⁴

The current social history that is being used by the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services needs to be revised for the domestic violence offenders to include more

⁴ <https://www.womenshealth.gov/>

information. The American Probation Parole Association (APPA) study indicated that the following information should be included in the social history of the offender at the time of intake⁵:

1. Family background and childhood exposure to violence such as violence between parents and any experience of being abused as a child.
2. Substance abuse history, drug of choice and prior treatment.
3. Mental health problems and treatment history including diagnoses and medication
4. Possession or access to firearms, ammunition, firearm permits and any activities that may indicate weapon expertise or pattern of use (military service and hunting).
5. Parenting history including children and stepchildren.
6. Prior history of assaults and detail of each episode.
7. Information on anger triggers.

The above information would be beneficial for the agent to have to develop a baseline of the offender's criminogenic background, triggers and predication of risk factors that may prevent the offender to successfully complete supervision and preventing a repeat the cycle of domestic abuse. This information would be vital in creating a supervision plan that would chart the critical components for substance abuse treatment, battery group discussions and professional counseling.

In the collection of the 100 social histories, information was obtained on the domestic violence offender's usage of alcohol and drugs. From the information, only nine (9) out of the




⁵ American Probation Parole Association
<https://www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/APPA/pubs/CCRDV.pdf>

one hundred (100) admitted to using marijuana. It is well known that the offender population consider marijuana as the lesser addictive drug and choose to confess to the usage before any other drug. However, according to the data that was obtained from the Domestic Violent Supervision Unit Manager, Shannon Meyer, for the month of November 2018, 324 of the 1095 domestic violent offenders tested positive for either marijuana, methamphetamine and cocaine (See Appendix B). This is a result of 29.58 % of the tested offenders was positive for an illegal substance. According to the article Domestic Violence and Drug Abuse, the usage of drugs and alcohol is a leading risk factor in domestic violence⁶. Of the domestic violence program directors that were interviewed in this article, 87% of the domestic violence directors reported there is a significant increase in domestic abuse when alcohol or drugs are involved.

In reviewing the draft policy for the domestic violence program, the program has three phases. DVS Phase 1, DVS Phase 2 and DVS Phase 3. In DVS Phase 1, all domestic violence offenders are initially place in this phase for at least the first 90 days of their supervision. DVS Phase 1 requires an initial home visit (HV) or home visit progress audit (HVPA) to be performed with 10 days after the offender is sentenced to the domestic violence supervision. The offender must conduct at least one office visit per month, one group report per month, one visit face to face with a domestic treatment provider, employment verification and one random drug test per month. If the offender successfully completes DVS PHASE 1, the offender will transition to DVS PHASE 2, where he will be supervised at this level for 6 months. The only difference in the requirements in PHASE 2, is that the offender is not required to conduct

⁶ <https://addictionresource.com/domestic-violence-and-drug-abuse/>

monthly reporting into the county office. After completing the two phases, the offender will remain on DVS PHASE 3 until the remaining of his supervision unless the offender violates the conditions of the domestic violence supervision (See Appendix C). The chart below demonstrates how an offender will progress through the phases of domestic violence supervision.

<u>DVS PHASE1</u>  1ST 90 DAYS OF SUPERVISION	<u>DVS PHASE2</u>  90 DAYS THROUGH 6 MONTHS OF SUPERVISION	<u>DVS PHASE3</u>  6 MONTHS TO END OF SUPERVISION
INITIAL HV OR HVPA PERFORMED WITHIN 10 DAYS MINIMUM CONTACTS: ONE HVPA PER MONTH ONE OFFICE VISIT PER MONTH ONE GROUP REPORT PER MONTH ONE DV TREATMENT CONTACT FACE TO FACE PER MONTH ONE EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION PER MONTH ONE RANDOM DRUG AND ALCOHOL TEST PER MONTH	MINIMUM CONTACTS: ONE HVPA AND ONE FVPA PER MONTH ONE GROUP REPORT PER MONTH ONE DV TREATMENT CONTACT FACE TO FACE PER MONTH ONE EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION ONE RANDOM DRUG AND ALCOHOL TEST PER MONTH	MINIMUM CONTACTS: ONE HV OR HVPA EVERY OTHER MONTH ONE GROUP REPORT PER MONTH ONE DV TREATMENT CONTACT FACE TO FACE PER MONTH IF STILL ENROLLED IN TREATMENT ONE EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION RANDOM DRUG AND ALCOHOL TEST IF THERE IS REASON FOR CAUSE

In each phase of the domestic violence program, the agent is required to have contact with the offender in the residence. According to November 2018 data from the department's Domestic Violence Unit, 734 home visits were conducted per the required guidelines, however,

334 home visits were not completed. Also, the agents are required to attend the domestic violence treatment groups each month, an additional contact with the offender in the community, such as, at the offender's employment, a local shopping center, etc. Below are outline discussion topics that the domestic violence agent must discuss with the offender at each contact in the community or residence:

DV Home Visit/Home Visit Progress Audit Questions

1. Ask about attendance in Battery Intervention Program/Substance Abuse Treatment
2. Ask the offender: What are you learning from the class
3. Ask the offender: How are you applying your learning to life
4. Ask and look for alcohol and/or drug use. Follow up with a drug test and ask others in the home
5. Ask about employment
6. Ask about weapons/ammunition in the home. Search the DV home.
7. Ask about victim contact and have they had any contact with the victim. If the offender lives with the victim, ask this question in a separate moment
8. Ask who lives in the home
9. Ask about new relationships and communicating with new partner

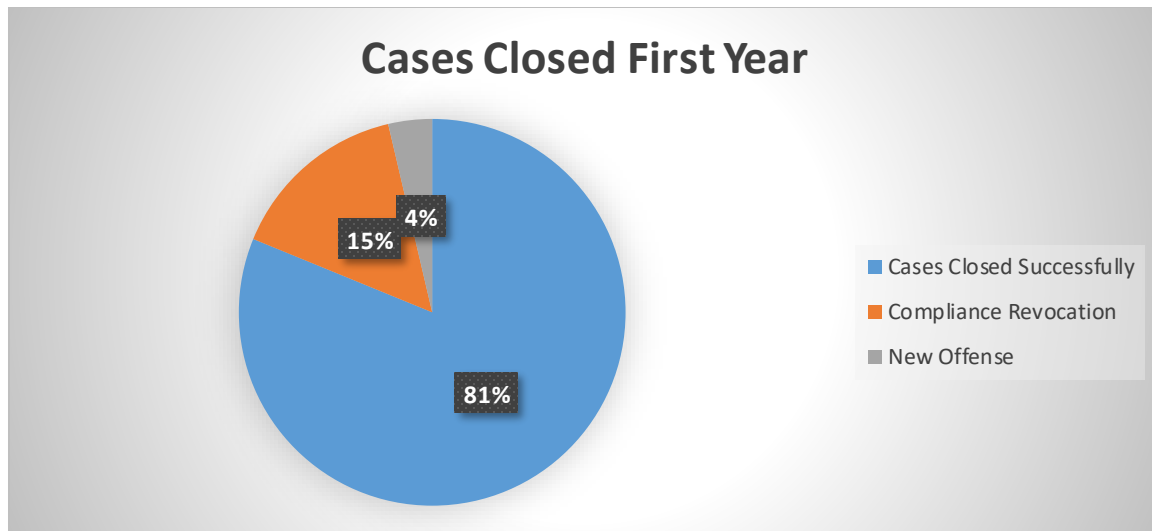
Tool Tips

1. Listen for and challenge the offender's attempts to deny, minimize, rationalize, or externalize his/her behavior. Do not give offenders support for their excuses they offer to explain their abusive behavior.
2. Reinforce to the offender that there are consequences for failing to comply with his/her conditions of supervision.

3. Ask questions in an open-ended manner. Avoid leading questions that would lead to leading answers.
4. Always take Supervision Plan to the HV (Home visit) and/or FVPA (Field visit progress audit).

In a random survey, I asked several agents, what are the obstacles that is preventing the 100% contacts with the offenders? The agent staff stated that the overwhelming criteria of the program with the number of offenders on their caseloads. The agent staff has approximately 55 or more domestic violent offenders per caseload. The America Probation Parole Association recommends no more than 35 domestic violent offenders per caseload. Over the span of 18 months of this program, only 7 of the 20 agents who were originally trained to supervise this population remain. This is a 65% turnover rate.

In the first six months of this program (November 2017 to June 2018), the department's Research and Evaluation Unit data shows 327 cases were closed during this timeframe. Of the 327 cases that were closed, 280 (86%) closed successfully and 47 cases were closed unsuccessfully. Forty-one of the unsuccessful closures were closed due to the offender not complying with the conditions of the domestic violence program, which resulted in revocation (offender sent to Department of Corrections for prison time) and 6 cases were closed due to new offense. The first full year of the domestic violence program data shows that 577 cases were closed. The chart below gives a break down on how the 577 cases were closed. Please note that of the cases that received new offenses, Research and Evaluation are working to determine if the new offenses are an additional domestic violence offense.



Per the data that was provided, the domestic violence program success rate of cases closed is notable. There are many positive aspects of the program. Such as, the domestic violence agent communication with the domestic violent offenders, the presence of the agent in the community where the offender resides, agent communications with the victim and family members. Also, the agent holding the offender accountable by being present at battery counseling, frequent drug testing and responding to positive results in a timely manner and having the offender to discuss their relationship triggers in battery peer group. The data demonstrates majority of domestic violent offenders are attempting to comply with the guidelines of the program. It is too early in the program to determine if the supervision of this population has had an impact on future behavior changes to curtail the domestic violence within this state.

Through the research of this project, there are several adverse components that may affect the long-term success of this program. There are:

1. The overwhelming turnover rate with the domestic violence agents.
2. Additional positions are needed to reduce the current caseloads and to address the increase numbers of offenders who are being sentenced to the domestic violence program.
3. The lack of knowledge of the program with management staff. The program in the beginning, only trained the new domestic violent agents, their supervisors were trained roughly a year later.
4. Domestic Violence Agents and their supervisors are unable to retrieve the data from the Offender Management System (OMS). The data is sent to the agents and supervisors by the Domestic Violent Unit Manager. The supervisors are unable to address work performance in a timely manner, which has created a lack of accountability.
5. The Domestic Violent Agent position was a feeding ground for promotion, therefore, agents were not invested in the program.
6. Due to the turnover rate, caseloads became vacant without a trained domestic violent agent to supervise it.
7. The policy is still in draft mode. Only the domestic violent agent and their supervisor has a copy of the draft.

There is a need for additional agent positions to reduce the number of offenders per caseloads. Prompt and better training is needed for the agent staff and those who are in their chain of command. Managers learned about the criteria and expectations of the program through their domestic violence agents. Managers should be trained prior to the selection of hiring the agent. The domestic violence program needs to be marketed better within the agency. There should be an ongoing forum to discuss the domestic violence crisis in this state with all staff, better communications throughout the agency about the program. Also, hire personnel who have a background or an interest in counseling and social behavior, this will also impact the turnover rate of the program. Finally, after eighteen months of the program, the draft policy needs to be finalized and published. The published policy will allow a reference point for other staff members to assist with the domestic violent offenders until a specialized agent is hired.

In ensuring the long-term success of the domestic violence program, the department should conduct a process evaluation of the program. First, the domestic violence agents should be interviewed and asked the following questions: (1) How satisfied are you with the domestic violence program (2) What areas of improvement are needed (3) Were you provided adequate training (4) What other training is needed and (5) Is the program meeting its objectives. It is also necessary to interview those agents that left this program for other opportunities within the department. Secondly, a focus group should be assembled of current and past offenders in this program. The focus group questions should be (1) How did the program impact your violent behavior (2) What behavior skills you are using from the program (3) Did your agent review/explain the objectives of the program (4) Overall, how satisfied are you with the

program and how can it be improved. Currently, the success of the program is based on cases that expire without any violations. The success rate should be determined by years of non-domestic violence convictions, after the completion of the program.

Overall, I believe that there is a need to have agents with a specialized domestic violence case load at the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon. Domestic Violence in our state is an unhealthy syndrome. It has reflected poorly on the state of South Carolina. As the Domestic Violence program matures, the impact of the program has the propensity to impact future behaviors of the abusers and to educate others in community corrections.

Appendix:

1. Appendix A- Domestic Violent Bill 16-25-10
2. Appendix B- South Carolina Department Probation, Parole and Pardon Services
November 2018 data for Home Visits and Drug tests conducted by Domestic Violence
Agents
3. Appendix C- South Carolina Department Probation, Parole and Pardon Services
Domestic Violence Draft Policy